

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 208 420

CS 206 627

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TITLE Listening, Grammar, Reading, Writing: Preparing Foreign Students for English and the TOEFL.
PUB DATE Oct 80
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Fall Conference of the Florida Council of Teachers of English (Gainesville, FL, October 16-18, 1980).
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; *English (Second Language); Grammar; Listening Comprehension; Reading Comprehension; *Second Language Instruction; Teaching Methods; *Test Coaching; *Test Wiseness; Vocabulary; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Test of English as a Foreign Language

ABSTRACT

The Santa Fe Community College (Gainesville, Florida) offers courses to prepare students for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). The two classes--one intermediate and one advanced--meet three times a week for three hours each session. Grammar explanations are presented during the first two classes each week, and students are offered opportunities to work out exercises and to ask questions. The teaching method consists of the presentation of a formula, which the students tend to remember more readily than a long explanation, followed by an explanation, various examples, and a study sheet of at least 20 examples related to the problem area. Students correct their own papers and score them. Emphasis is given to grammar, listening, vocabulary, and comprehension. At the conclusion of the class an actual TOEFL is simulated during which the different sections of the test are rigidly timed, answer sheets are provided, and the TOEFL format is used.

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Listening, Grammar, Reading, Writing: Preparing Foreign
Students for English and the TOEFL

At Santa Fe Community College various levels of basic English classes for the foreign born are taught. They consist of Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced EFL (English as a Foreign Language), Writing Skills, and TOEFL.

The TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) preparation class has become the most popular EFL offering. From the original class of 15 in January, 1979, monthly enrollment has increased to more than 60 students. All non-native speakers of English must take the TOEFL for admission to most American colleges and universities. Required scores vary from one institution to another, but the average is 500 for undergraduates. This is an American-made test given here as well as in foreign countries but required only in the United States.

The two-hour exam tests four areas of comprehension: listening, grammar, vocabulary, and reading. After studying TOEFL material for several months, we began developing a wide variety of materials which simulate those of the real TOEFL. Our class meets three times a week for three hours each session. There are two classes; one intermediate and one advanced. The first two classes of each week are preparation periods where we present detailed grammar explanations, students work out exercises and have ample opportunities to ask questions. Our method consists of presenting a formula which students tend to remember more readily than a long explanation. Then we give an explanation, various examples, and a study sheet of at least 20 examples related to the problem area. Students correct their own papers and score them. In the intermediate level, we also do listening comprehension practices on a variety of topics. Some of the listening is in the form of a simple statement, and students are

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expected to find a statement in their test booklets which is the same or nearly the same as the statement. There are also dialogues in which one person says something, then another person says something, and a third voice asks a question. The last form of listening is the longer dialogue or reading, after which four questions are asked of the students.

Our test and the TOEFL are totally multiple choice, and students are asked to select the best answer for each item.

We tell them about various methods for improving their listening comprehension. Some suggestions are: 1) Watch news stories on television; 2) Call tape recorded messages (time, movie theaters, and weather forecasts); 3) Attend lectures; 4) Use the language lab at school; 5) Talk with native English speakers who use good English; and 6) Listen to the radio. The listening comprehension section consists of knowledge of idioms, two-word verbs, contractions, numbers, conditionals, and slang.

In dealing with numbers, we teach students to listen for the stressed syllables. The teen numbers are stressed on the last syllable--thir-téen, four-téen, fif-téen etc., while the multiples of ten are stressed on the first syllable--sìx-ty, séven-ty, eíghty etc. For example, listen to the following statement and then on your answer sheet find the statement which means the same or nearly the same.

You will hear: Travel 60 miles East on Highway 90, and then turn north on Highway 50.

- You will read:
- (A) Drive for 90 miles on East Highway 16, and then turn left and go 50 miles more.
 - (B) Go east on Highway 90 for 60 miles and then go north on Highway 50.
 - (C) Travel east on Highway 19 for 16 miles; after that, drive 50 miles on North Highway.
 - (D) After you travel for 90 miles on East Highway 90, go right on Highway 15.

Letter B is the correct answer. Numbers are very difficult for foreign students, so we try to do many number problems in the listening section.

Negative conditionals also cause difficulties. In a conditional, negative means positive, and positive means negative.

Ex. Mary couldn't have gone to the conference if her boss hadn't paid her way.

means that Mary attended the conference because her boss paid her way.

Ex. Had John known about the test, he would have studied for it.

means that John didn't know about the test, and therefore, he didn't study for it.

The following contractions are often confusing for foreign students and should be studied in detail and used often.

should've gone, I'd rather, I'd better, he's written,
he's writing

Students need to be able to distinguish between T and D sounds by the vowels that precede them: COD COT

Also teachers should give students lists of idiomatic expressions, explain them, make sure that students understand them, and then have them write original sentences and dialogues using them. These dialogues should be taped and students should then be tested on them.

Slang is acceptable in the listening comprehension. However, the grammar section emphasizes formal, written English, and no form of slang is considered correct.

Students should be guided to magazines specializing in the use of good English. We recommend TIME and NEWSWEEK for more difficult readings, READER'S DIGEST for a variety of less complicated material, and SCHOLASTIC MAGAZINE for the beginners.

The grammar section is divided into two parts. The first involves a partial statement which must be completed by selecting the correct statement from the four multiple choice answers. The second part of this

section includes sentences in which four words or phrases are underlined and lettered A,B,C,D. The students must decide which of these is grammatically incorrect. Except in the case of homonyms, this never involves errors in spelling. On the TOEFL the students do not have to correct the error, but in our practice tests we advise them to correct the answers so that they can review the exercises at home. Our students enjoy doing these exercises in class. They correct and score their own papers and try to achieve a perfect score. In the advanced class, the examples are harder and the sentences more complicated than in the intermediate.

A few of the problem areas covered are:

- (1) verb + infinitive vs. verb + gerund

We give students a long list of those verbs which require the infinitive or gerund. Sample sentences are given and then the students try to make up new ones. Finally, they are tested on this concept.

- (2) Prepositions except TO are followed by the gerund. (TO may be either part of an infinitive or take the gerund.)

After writing the letter, Bill mailed it.

Ted is fond of teaching English composition classes.

We are looking forward to spending our vacation in the mountains.

Jeff had to finish his experiment before leaving for his vacation.

- (3) Count vs. non-count nouns

Students learn to use much, little, and less with non-count nouns (e.g. water, coffee, time, money--something that cannot be counted unless put into containers like cups, or glasses, or divided into units like minutes, hours, dollars, or cents.) Count nouns (e.g. books, people, days--anything that has a plural form) use many and few.

- (4) Others, the other, and another

- (5) Conditionals

Conditionals and their usage are probably the biggest cause for concern among foreign students. We give ours a very simple formula for real and unreal (contrary - to - fact) conditionals, have them learn it, and apply it to

numerous exercises. The formula is as follows:

For real conditions (those that are habitual or will most likely happen)

IF clause

RESULT clause

present
present

future
command

If I have the time, I will attend the concert. (Right now I see no reason for not attending, and I probably will)

If you go to the store, please buy me a newspaper.

For unreal conditions (those that are contrary-to-fact or untrue)

(Now) past
(Past) past perfect

conditional
conditional perfect

If he had decided earlier, he could have left on the afternoon flight. (He decided too late, and therefore, could not take the afternoon flight.)

I would watch the movie on t.v. if I weren't so busy. (I am so busy that I cannot watch t.v.)

(6) Passives

The tornado destroyed thirty houses.
subject verb complement

Thirty houses were destroyed by the tornado.
subject BE past part.

Other exercises are provided for irregular verbs, use of articles, subject and object pronouns to mention just a few.

The first part of the grammar section also involves style questions which can be concerned with subject-verb agreement, use of parallel structures, or Count vs. non-count nouns. We show students how to attack these style questions and how to eliminate the wrong answers. Although this is the shortest section of the test, for many it is the most difficult and the area on which we spend the most time trying to develop their skills.

The vocabulary section consists of 30 sentences in which a word or phrase is underlined and the students are expected to find among the four choices a word or phrase that is most nearly the same as the underlined word or phrase.

We recommend that students read as much as possible. Well-written materials can be found in major city newspapers, good books, and READER'S DIGEST's word section. Constant reading will increase one's vocabulary and also help him to read faster. Since this is a timed test, this is very important. Memorizing long lists of words is a useless task because the words will be easily forgotten and may include only one definition rather than all possible ones.

In each session of the advanced class, we work with a vocabulary section which follows the TOEFL format. Students are encouraged to ask questions about vocabulary, but are also told to check out all new words in their bilingual dictionaries. They are taught how to eliminate from the four possible answers.

Example: The supply of silver in the mines had dwindled, causing great concern among the people of the town.

A. diminished B. increased C. extended D. devalued

The clue words "causing great concern" should help the student eliminate B and C. Letter D could be eliminated on the basis that the price devalued, NOT the supply. Thus A should have been selected as the correct answer.

Extensive practice with synonyms and antonyms helps increase vocabulary. New words are used as much as possible during the course to help reinforce them.

Example: The densely populated area was a breeding place for infectious diseases.

A. meagerly B. improperly C. sparsely D. intensely

Letters A and C are antonyms of densely, so they can be eliminated immediately. B is an illogical choice because we don't talk about improperly populated areas. So D is the correct response.

Students also work with homonyms, derivational suffixes and prefixes. A teacher could make up exercises on word families. One that we use is a chart which is divided into four columns labeled noun, verb, adjective, and adverb. One word is filled in, and the students supply the missing forms.

<u>NOUN</u>	<u>VERB</u>	<u>ADJECTIVE</u>	<u>ADVERB</u>
safety salvation saviour	save	safe	safely

Emphasis is placed on being able to distinguish among confusingly-related words such as effect-affect, advice-advise, and alone-lonely. Some commonly-misused words are custom-costume and desert-dessert. These are also confused by many native speakers and require more practice. Students compose original sentences with them, and are given a multiple choice test on them as well.

To prepare students for the Reading Comprehension Section, we teach them a variety of reading skills. We show them how to figure out vocabulary meaning by analyzing the context of a sentence. Another very important technique is skimming; one that should be taught and used frequently. Our students practice this technique with longer readings especially where four or more questions will be asked. First, students are taught to read the questions to get an idea of what will be asked later. They look for transition words such as although, therefore, however, and nevertheless. Words such as never and always are tricky and are not usually correct answers. Students are taught to make inferences and draw conclusions since many questions involve this sort of analysis. These questions are asked about the following reading:

- (1) When did the first award ceremony take place?
A. 1895 B. 1901 C. 1962 D. 1968
- (2) Which of the following is not true?
A. Awards vary in monetary value.
B. Ceremonies are held on December 10 to commemorate Nobel's invention.
C. Politics can play an important role in selecting the winners.
D. A few individuals have won two awards.
- (3) In how many fields are prizes bestowed?
A. 2 B. 5 C. 6 D. 10

After inventing dynamite, Swedish-born Alfred Nobel became a very rich man. However, he foresaw its universally destructive powers too late. Nobel preferred not to be remembered as the inventor of dynamite, therefore, in 1895 just two weeks before his death, he created a fund to be used for awarding prizes to people who had made worthwhile contributions to mankind. Originally there were five awards: literature, physics, chemistry, medicine, and peace. Economics was added in 1968, just 67 years after the first awards ceremony.

Nobel's original legacy of \$9 million was invested, and the interest on this sum is now used for the awards which vary from \$30,000 to \$125,000.

Every year on December 10, the anniversary of Nobel's death, the awards (a gold medal, illuminated diploma, and money) are presented to the winners. Sometimes politics play an important role in the judges' decisions. Americans have won numerous science awards, but relatively few literature prizes.

No awards were presented from 1940-1942 at the beginning of World War II. Some people have won two prizes, but this is rare; others have shared their prizes.

For the answer to the first question, the students are expected to read the sentence "Economics was added in 1968, just 67 years after the first awards ceremony" and conclude that $1968 - 67 = 1901$, thus selecting letter B as the correct answer. Using the same sentence, the answer can be found for the third question (letter C).

The answer to the second question is B because the reading says, "Every year on December 10, the anniversary of Nobel's death,...."

Read the following selection and answer the questions indicated.

Ever since man has inhabited the earth, he has made use of various forms of communication. Generally, this expression of thoughts and feelings has been in the form of oral speech. When there is a language barrier, communication is accomplished through sign language in which motions stand for letters, words, and ideas. Tourists, Indians, the deaf, and the dumb have had to resort to this form of expression. Many of these symbols for whole words are very picturesque and exact and can be used internationally; spelling, however, cannot.

Body language transmits ideas or thoughts by certain actions. A wink can be a way of flirting or indicating that the party is only joking. A nod signifies approval, while shaking the head indicates a negative reaction.

Other forms of nonlinguistic language can be found in Braille (a system of raised dots read with the fingertips), signal flags, Morse code, and smoke signals. Road maps, and picture signs also guide, warn, and instruct mankind.

While verbalization is the most common form of language, other systems and techniques also express man's thoughts and feelings.

(1) Which of the following best summarizes this passage?

- A. When language is a barrier, mankind will find other forms of communication.
- B. Everybody uses only one form of communication.
- C. Nonlinguistic language is invaluable to foreigners.
- D. Although other forms of communication exist, verbalization is the fastest.

In this question, students are asked to draw a conclusion. Based on the reading, letter A is the best answer.

The following question requires the students to be able to count all of the forms mentioned and arrive at a conclusion.

(2) How many different forms of communication are mentioned here?

A. 5 B. 7 C. 9 D. 11

Letter C is the answer.

We have composed all the materials for these exercises. You can do the same with a little time and a few ideas. All of these materials can be adapted to any level of EFL as well as SAT. If you write your own readings, make them interesting. Find areas of interest to your students. If you have teenagers, do something with hotrods and rock stars. They will be more motivated to learn.

In our preparation class, we try to simulate the actual TOEFL in every possible detail by rigidly timing the different sections, providing answer sheets, keeping the actual TOEFL format, and not allowing students to leave the testing area until the exam is completed. Since the score is based on the number right and not on the number wrong, we show them how to guess the last answers even though they may run out of time and not be able to finish. By choosing one letter A,B,C, or D, they fill in all the remaining blanks with that letter and tend to have a better chance of increasing their score.

After a 15-minute break, we get the group together again and read the answers. They all score their own answer sheets marking the total number correct from each section at the bottom. Then we give them a converted score which approximates the real one, but is not the same. The real TOEFL scores are done on a computer and are based on the total number of students taking the test, the number who scored each one correctly etc. We let them know that it

is only an indication of how they are doing, and that they should not become too confident if they are doing well.

As a result of taking our TOEFL preparation classes and undergoing a simulated testing situation, students know what to expect on the real test. They practice sitting for the required two hours; become more aware of their own problem areas; know what to look for in the format; and learn various test-taking techniques. The best result is that they are more confident when they take the real test and are able to score higher. At least 80% of our students in the past two years have scored high enough to be accepted at the colleges and universities of their choice.

After having spent two years developing the materials for this class, we have written a very detailed TOEFL preparation manual because those already on the market do not adequately prepare the students for this test. Although specifically designed for the TOEFL, the exercises can be used in any EFL class or in any program where the four comprehension areas are stressed. Our text can be used in the classroom or as an individualized learning tool.

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